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ABSTRACT

Against the background of research indicating that women are underrepresented in educational administration, this study examines the question of gender bias in the selection of superintendents. Choosing for their sample population 15 school districts from central Oklahoma, the researchers sent simulated resumes for 3 male and 3 female candidates with virtually the same qualifications to 43 school board members (approximately 3 per district). Results of a 1-way analysis of variance of the 37 Summary Ranking forms returned do not confirm the hypothesis that gender makes a significant difference in school board members' selection of superintendents; issues related to gender were raised by only 1 board member. The lack of evidence of gender bias in the study's findings--especially in light of the findings of previous research and the documented underrepresentation of women in educational administration and administrative positions generally--suggests the need for a reexamination of the investigation's methodology, theoretical basis, and assumptions and the need also for studies derived from real rather than ideal scenarios. Copies of the six resumes and the Summary Ranking form are appended. (JBM)

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GENDER BIAS IN SUPERINTENDENT SELECTION: A PROJECTIVE ANALYSIS

by Catherine Coggins, University of Oklahoma
Joan Goth, University of Oklahoma
Thomas Wiggins, University of Oklahoma

This paper is prepared for and presented to the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association in New Orleans, April, 1984.

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Introduction

Women are often employed in jobs which are low in what Kanter (1977) terms opportunity and power. Opportunity is the chance to be promoted to a job with more official authority, and power is the ability to get things done, to mobilize resources, and to get and use whatever it is that a person needs for the goals s/he is attempting to meet. Kanter (1977) further suggests that a preference for male leaders is a preference for power in the context of an organization where women do not have access to power through activities and alliances.

Brown (1979) estimates that in the business/industrial complex, women represent almost 5% of the middle management and barely 1% of top management. These numbers are duplicated in educational administration with women comprising 67% of public school teachers (Lyon and Saario, 1973), while only 1% of all women in elementary education and .4% of women in secondary education were principals in the mid 1970's (Hansot and Tyack, 1982). These studies show no change from the investigation of Schmuck (1975) when it was found that the career path to the superintendency is usually begun at the secondary level, the role where women are found in administration is most commonly the elementary principalship, and women often fill the quasi-line positions such as directors, supervisors,

consultants, coordinators, planners and evaluators.

Two studies, Woods (1980) and Moore (1981) report actual declines in numbers and status of women in educational administration. Wood (1980) found no statistically significant differences between many personality traits of female and male administrators, however female administrators actually scored higher on typical male traits while male administrators scored higher on typical female traits.

Background of the Problem

A labor force analysis by gender measures equity in the opportunity for women to fill top-level positions. A labor force analysis is done by recording the relevant characteritics, usually race and sex, of a person in every job and then aggregating the results by job title, department, or whatever other classifications are relevant to the issues of concern. This reveals the relative balance between the pool of qualified people and the degree of equitable representation of job by race and sex. Such an analysis has been conducted (Stansbury, Thomas, Wiggins, 1984) and indicates underrepresentation of women in the superintendency.

Neidig (1980) cites studies that indicate that women are effective educational administrators and explores reasons for the underrepresentation of women in administrative positions. Among reasons listed for under-representation are:

- men are better suited for administration
- sex-bias in evaluating the performance of women
- women may be afraid of failure

- criteria other than task competence and qualifications are used in the consideration of women
- women lack support groups

Other reasons for underrepresentation of women in administrative positions are cited by Niedermayer (1974):

- recruitment techniques
- make-up of bodies involved in selection
- language of job descriptions
- sex-typed distribution of extracurricular activities sponsorship
- job progression
- different job titles and prestige but similar duties
- age factor (women need to be older)
- isolation on the job

Stansbury, Thomas and Wiggins (1984) consider the issue of the underrepresentation of women on individual, organizational and institutional levels. Six theoretical approaches were investigated:

- motivational and attitudinal models
- sex role socialization
- sex-typed jobs and internal labor market
- the constraint of numbers
- patriarchy
- minorities within a minority

Neidig's (1980) study does include several suggestions to increase women's representation in administration:

- provide more support in departments of higher educational administration
- provide visibility to women in professional organizations
- establish internships
- provide announcements of job openings to men and women at the same time
- provide support for beginning women administrators

The pervasive theme of the research and literature on issues related to gender and equity strongly suggests that women are underrepresented in educational administration. This led to the basic problem for this research: Are school board members inclined to favor male archetypes as superintendents in selection processes? Ancilliary research questions addressed: preferences associated with the candidates, type of terminal degree (Ed.D. and Ph.D.), years of experience, types of experience, membership in professional organizations, and scholarly production.

Method

The population studied was school board members in the State of Oklahoma. Fifteen school districts from Central Oklahoma, stratified into categories of small, medium, and large were selected. The State School Board Association was contacted to obtain the list of school board members from each district. From each of the fifteen districts in Central Oklahoma, three members were randomly selected. Two members of the total pool could not be contacted, arriving at a sample size of forty-three (N=43). Each of the forty-three were contacted by telephone and asked to participate in a study to investigate the qualifications school board members would deem important in considering an individual for a superintendency in their school district. All forty-three agreed to participate. The unit of analysis for the study was the school board member.

To investigate the basic research question, prototypic profiles were developed for six potential candidates for the superintendency in a hypothetical school district in search of a superintendent. Resumes were

constructed for the six candidates, three male and three female. The resumes were drawn-up to depict the candidates as similar, if not identical in training, experience, professional affiliations, and publications. The variable of gender was the only significantly differentiating variable. The six resumes were initially reviewed twice by a panel of experts consisting of four professors of educational administration at the University of Oklahoma. These resumes are included in the Appendix.

A Summary Ranking form (see Appendix) was developed to allow the sample to rank the candidates from most to least desirable with a neutral category. This methodology follows that scaling scheme devised by Friedenburg (1967). It is a forced-choice projective analysis in which the participant ranks candidates with similar, if not identical, resumes, thus forcing the variable of gender to the surface.

A pilot test was administered utilizing thirty educational administration students at the University of Oklahoma. The purpose of the panel review and the pilot test was to check the feasibility of the resumes of the hypothetical superintendent candidates and the assumed intention of similarly, if not identically, qualified candidates except for gender.

Another attempt to control the hypothetical candidates qualifications was used. The forty-three board member subjects were randomly assigned to group A or group B. A blind reversal was performed on the candidates' resumes, such that the qualifications on the female candidates' resumes in group A were the qualifications on the male candidates' resumes in group B. This counter-balance effect was built into the methodology to further insure the interchangability of the resumes and to control for

any variance accept gender.

The packets were mailed with a follow-up contact being made several days later to make arrangements for pick-up. Written, open-ended comments were invited at the end of the Summary Ranking. Subjects were additionally interviewed regarding their selections at the time of the pick-up. Those who could not be contacted were mailed a self-addressed envelope so they could return their information. Of the original sample of forty-three school board members contacted, a total of thirty-seven were finally secured. Five of these thirty-seven refused to rank the candidates and, therefore, their reports were not used. This left a total sample of thirty-two (N=32). The five school board members who refused to rank the candidates did make comments, and these will be reviewed in the final analysis.

One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) with repeated measures was used to analyze the basic hypothesis: There is no significant difference in the choices between male and female candidates made by school board members in selecting superintendents. A content analysis of the interview data was accomplished by following in principle what Carini (1975) has described as documentation. Documentation is an accrual of perceptions of subjects interviewed enabling patterns or constellations of plausible explanations to emerge through the interpretation of the major descriptors, key phrases, and other consistencies revealed in the interview data. The reporting as a result of this analysis will be reported in narrative emphasizing significant content similarities resulting from the documentation.

Results

The results of the one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) with repeated measures showed no support for the basic null hypothesis that there is no significant differences in the choices between male and female candidates made by school board members in selecting superintendents. The null hypothesis was not rejected at the alpha level .05.

Table I

Differences in Selection of Candidates by Gender

Source	MS	df	F ratio
Resume	8.20	5	4.74 *
Sex of ratee within Resume and groups	1.73	6	1.19 NS
Raters by sex of ratee within Resume and groups	1.44	144	

* $p < .05$

The preference of the resumes selected by the board member subjects (N=32) are ranked in Table II (see Appendix for resumes). The values assigned to each ranking in Table II are the result of averaging the rankings on (1-6) on the Summary Ranking sheet (see Appendix).

Table II

Rankings of Preference of Resumes of Superintendent Candidates

Ranking as to preference	Group A (Resume #)		Group B (Resume #)		Total (Resume #)	
1	#6 (male)	2.31	#6 (female)	2.08	#6	2.19
2	#5 (female)	2.54	#5 (male)	2.69	#5	2.62
3	#1 (female)	3.00	#1 (male)	2.77	#1	2.89
4	#4 (male)	3.23	#2 (female)	2.92	#2	3.15
5	#2 (male)	3.39	#3 (male)	3.23	#3	3.39
6	#3 (female)	3.54	#4 (female)	4.31	#4	3.77

For the most part the preference rankings remained consistent as the candidate's gender was rotated to account for variance that may have occurred extraneously. The #6 resume was the most preferred as male or female and #4 resume the least except in the case where #4 was assigned as a male's resume.

The principal characteristics of resume #6 are:

- 19 years of experience in linear sequence from teacher, assistant principal, principal, assistant superintendent, superintendent
- the terminal degree was the Ph.D.
- organizations include an "ethics committee"
- one publication

The principal characteristics of resume #4 are:

- 14 years of experience in linear sequence but with steps from teacher, principal, superintendent
- the terminal degree was the Ed.D.
- the academic experience included the M.B.A.
- greater number of organizational memberships
- one publication

The results of the subject interviews provided a wide range of both implicit and explicit data relevant to the problem under investigation:

- Interviewees did not make reference to differences/similarities related to gender with one exception, i.e., "My District would have problems with a female superintendent (maybe acceptable in another five years)."
- Some comments were related to concerns about the family, children, and parenting values of the candidates without reference to gender.
- Personnel management qualifications of the candidates was stressed as important but not listed in resumes.
- Most subjects made direct or indirect reference to the importance of interviewing candidates. Interviewing was viewed by some subjects as more important than those qualifications listed in the resumes.
- Public relations, "selling" the school program, employee relations and other general "marketing" concerns were often referred to in the interviews.
- Past experience, among those qualifications listed in the resumes, was most often viewed as the single most important criterion related to qualifications of the candidates.
- Degree, majors, professional organizations, and publications were not criteria deemed to be of major importance to subjects regarding qualification for the superintendency.
- Five subjects in the sample declined to rank the candidates implying that the information in the resumes was of less importance or that information was equal for each candidate therefore making it impossible to choose.
- The ability to manage the fiscal affairs of a school district was viewed as major in importance.
- Some subjects viewed the candidates as over-qualified for smaller school districts.

The most striking finding, as a result of the interviews and written comments, was that in only one case was any reference made to issues related to the gender of the candidates.

Discussion

The first and most certainly unexpected finding in this research was that there were no differences in the selection of candidates for the superintendency based upon the gender of the candidate. Thus, gender bias was not evident in this phase of the study. The literature and research suggests ample evidence of the presence of gender bias in viewing opportunities for women in leadership/administration and in educational administration specifically. In spite of a general theoretical framework and design, which attempted to control for the common defenses and contingencies which would disguise gender bias, gender bias was not discernable. The subsequent inquiry in search of plausible explanations for the lack of support for the central hypothesis included 1) a comprehensive review of the method employed in the study and 2) a reexamination of the theoretical basis upon which the initial assumptions were based.

Methodologically, the sampling (school board members in small, medium and large school districts in Central Oklahoma) may have been non-representative of the population (school board members in Oklahoma). The districts from which the sample board members were selected were in or near the large metropolitan area of Oklahoma City. School board members from metropolitan and more cosmopolitan areas might be expected to manifest less gender bias based upon their greater exposure to quantitatively more and qualitatively more accurate experiences involving gender equity. Such trends are suggested in selected larger metropolitan areas throughout the United States (Vornberg and Huffy, 1981).

The principal method of gathering the data, the projective analysis technique, may have been contaminating with demand characteristics which provoked less than valid subject responses. Specifically, the similarities of the six resumes of superintendent candidates may have been, as judged, so similar/equal that they may have "demanded" greater attention to the intended gender variable upon which to focus/base the ranking. If this occurred and gender became the obvious focus of the data gathering technique, normative rather than idiosyncratic responses/rankings may have resulted. Normative responses might reflect the current dialogue regarding equal rights while overlooking deeper personal values more reflective of potential gender bias. This renders the use of projective data collecting protocols particularly sensitive to contaminating demand characteristics inherent in the problem statements of social researchers.

The research and literature regarding issues related to the gender of incumbents in executive positions in education clearly indicate the underrepresentation of women. The assumption of gender bias in the hiring practices appointments and of governing bodies is consistent with the findings of the studies referred to in this investigation. The fact that this investigation was not consistent with that body of research and literature necessitates a reexamination of the theoretical basis upon which the assumptions of this investigation rest. That reexamination has failed to reveal any bases upon which one could raise doubt regarding the credibility of the existing body of theory and research forming the basis for the assumptions of this investigation. This necessitates that plausible explanations for the lack of support for the hypothesis be

focused upon the method, and, as stated above, such investigations to address more representative samples of school districts and focus upon designs which reveal data which are derived from real rather than ideal scenarios.

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APPENDIX A

Resumes

(These resumes were rotated between
male and female named candidates)

RICHARD LANG - Age 42

EDUCATION

Ed.D.	University of Illinois	(Secondary Administration)
M.A.	Ohio University	(Educational Administration)
B.A.	Ohio University	(Secondary Education)

EXPERIENCE

Superintendent of Schools:	Omaha, Nebraska (3 years)
Asst. Superintendent of Schools:	Evanston, Illinois (2 years)
Principal, West High School:	Evanston, Illinois (6 years)
Teacher, Washington High School	Columbus, Ohio (5 years)

ORGANIZATIONS

Nebraska Association of School Administrators

American Association of School Administrators

Vice President, Ohio Education Association

Phi Delta Kappa

PUBLICATIONS

"Manpower Planning in Secondary Schools" Education Administration

"Being a Better Principal" Today's Education

LINDA WALTERS - Age 45

EDUCATION

Ed.D.	University of Missouri at Columbia	(Educational Administration)
M.A.	Lincoln University	(Secondary Administration)
B.A.	University of Missouri at St. Louis	(Secondary Education)

EXPERIENCE

Superintendent of Schools:	North Little Rock, Arkansas (3 years)
Asst. Superintendent of Schools:	Alton, Illinois (4 years)
Principal, Alton High School:	Alton, Illinois (6 years)
Teacher, Alton High School (Math):	Alton, Illinois (6 years)

ORGANIZATIONS

Arkansas Association of School Administrators

American Association of School Administrators

Illinois Association of School Administrators

Illinois Education Association

National Education Association

PUBLICATIONS

"Back to the Classroom" Phi Delta Kappan

"Work Behavior in Public Schools" American Association of School Administrators Journal

PAUL ARNOLD - Age 42

EDUCATION

Ed.D.	Kansas State University	(Educational Administration)
M.S.	Kansas State University	(Educational Administration)
B.S.	University of Colorado	(Social Studies Education)

EXPERIENCE

Superintendent of Schools: Wichita, Kansas (2 years)

Director of Elementary Education: Wichita, Kansas (3 years)

Principal, Maxwell Elementary School: Wichita, Kansas (2 years)

Asst. Principal, Thomas Middle School: Topeka, Kansas (3 years)

Teacher, Barter Junior High (Social Studies): Topeka, Kansas (4 years)

Teacher, Meadow Elementary School (6th grade): Salina, Kansas (5 years)

ORGANIZATIONS

American Association of School Administrators (Board of Govenors)

Kansas Association of School Administrators

Kansas Education Association

Phi Delta Kappa

Vice Chairman, Kansas Commission on the Future of the Superintendency

NANCY SNELL - Age 43

EDUCATION

Ed.D. Texas Tech University (Educational Administration)

M.B.A. Texas Tech University

B.A. West Texas State University (Primary Education)

EXPERIENCE

Superintendent of Schools: Roswell, New Mexico (3 years)

Principal, Midland High School: Midland, Texas (5 years)

Teacher, Lincoln Elementary School (6th grade): Lubbock, Texas (6 years)

ORGANIZATIONS

Treasurer, New Mexico Association of School Administrators

American Association of School Administrators

Texas Association of School Administrators

Texas Education Association

National Education Association

PUBLICATIONS

"In Pursuit of Confident Education" American Association of School Administrators Journal

WILLIAM PARK -Age 43

EDUCATION

Ph.D.	University of Arizona	(Educational Administration)
M.S.	University of New Mexico	(Educational Administration)
B.S.	New Mexico State University	(Business Education)

EXPERIENCE

Superintendent of Schools: Wichita Falls, Texas (3 years)

Asst. Superintendent, Secondary Programs: Tucson, Arizona (3 years)

Principal, Indian Hills High School: Santa Fe, New Mexico (4 years)

Teacher, Indian Hills High School (Business Education): Sante Fe, NM (6 years)

ORGANIZATIONS

American Association of School Administrators

Chairman, Texas Association of School Administrators

National Education Association

PUBLICATIONS

"The Business Aspects of the Superintendency" The Educational Administrator

BARBARA JONES - Age 45

EDUCATION

Ph.D.	University of Nebraska	(Educational Administration)
M.S.	University of Iowa	(Educational Administration)
B.A.	University of Iowa	(Elementary Education and Administration)

EXPERIENCE

Superintendent of Schools: Saint Joseph, Missouri (3 years)

Asst. Superintendent of Instruction: St. Joseph, Missouri (3 years)

Principal, Porter Junior High: Ames, Iowa (5 years)

Asst. Principal, Grant Elementary School: Ames, Iowa (4 years)

Teacher, Parker Elementary School: Ames, Iowa (4 years)

ORGANIZATIONS

Ethics Committee, American Association of School Administrators

Treasurer, Nebraska Association of School Administrators

Phi Delta Kappa

PUBLICATIONS

"Leadership Styles of Superintendents" The Educational Administrator

APPENDIX B

Summary Ranking

SUMMARY RANKING

This project has been designed to attempt to identify those qualifications that School Board Members would deem important in considering an individual for a superintendent position in their school district.

Please follow these directions carefully.

A-1. Circle the two names of persons whom you believe are the most qualified for this position.

2. From these two, select the one person whom you feel is the more qualified. Write a 1 by that name and a 2 by the other.

B-1. Circle the two names of persons whom you believe are the least qualified for this position.

2. From these two, select the one person whom you feel is the less qualified. Write a 6 by that name and a 5 by the other.

C-1. Write 3 in the blanks remaining.

_____ RICHARD LANG

_____ LINDA WALTERS

_____ PAUL ARNOLD

_____ NANCY SNELL

_____ WILLIAM PARK

_____ BARBARA JONES

Write any additional comments in the spaces below.